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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 005922

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SUBJECT: DAS CHENEY MEETS WITH QUEEN RANIA: US ASSISTANCE,
WOMEN IN POLITICS, JORDAN FIRST.

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM REASONS: 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1.(C) SUMMARY. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs Elizabeth Cheney met with Queen Rania Oct 8 prior to the third annual micro-entrepreneur awards ceremony, which was held at the recently opened Zara Expo Center in Amman. The Queen complimented the successes of AID programs in Jordan, noted the potential for further micro-finance development here and discussed with DAS Cheney ideas for empowering women in Jordan and the region. The Queen lamented that Jordan's "track record is not good" regarding the election of women into parliament but was hopeful that this could change. The Queen also articulated the GOJ's "Jordan first" theme, saying that "the region needs an example of a government that has a positive reflection on its people." END SUMMARY.

2.(C) The Ambassador, DAS Cheney, AID Director Toni Christiansen-Wagner, Mrs. Gnehm and poloff met with Queen Rania and her personal assistant Oct 8 for a fifteen minute meeting prior to the micro-entrepreneur award ceremony. (Note: the awards are given annually by a local micro-finance association to micro entrepreneurs who receive loans from AID for their business projects). The Queen told DAS Cheney that the area of micro-finance was something in which she has a personal interest. She also noted the successes of AID programs in Jordan: "AID is excellent here. It correctly identifies the areas of need, and realizes that many areas and programs are interconnected." The Queen specifically noted AID's program on reproductive health as an area of success.

13. (C) On the issue of empowering women in the middle east, DAS Cheney explained that the Department will be hosting 65 female political leaders from the middle east in the US during the upcoming November elections. The women will be receiving campaign skills training and traveling outside Washington to observe grassroots campaigning in preparation for US mid-term elections. Cheney explained that the US hoped this would be a kick-off event for a larger regional campaign school for women, with future activities to be held in the region. The Queen expressed strong support for this program, and agreed that educating women on how to successfully organize a political campaign is essential for their success. Noting that "organization is most important," the Queen cited the success of the Islamic Action Front in Jordan as due in large part to their strong organizational ability. She said that Jordan's "track record is not good," on election of women to the parliament, noting that only one has been elected by popular vote (Toujan Faisal). The Queen said that, in general, she is against a quota system to ensure women are in parliament, but that perhaps a quota system for the short-term would be necessary.

14. (C) On domestic politics, the Queen said that she would like to get Jordanians to focus on where politicians stand on "four or five" specific issues, and hoped that people would "move away from slogans" (i.e. exclusively anti-US and anti-Israeli rhetoric) in domestic politics. She noted that it would be important for future elections to be about "Jordanian" issues that truly affect people's lives. There are serious problems in Israel/Palestine and Iraq, the Queen said, "but my husband always says that we have to carry on," and that the government must focus on the needs of Jordanians. She said that it is not always easy to communicate a message to the people but that, "the region needs an example of a government that has a positive reflection on its people."

15. (C) COMMENT. The Queen's comments on domestic politics are an articulation of the GOJ's "Jordan first" strategy, and a further indication that during a period of heightened regional tension, the GOJ is working on all fronts to convince Jordanians that their interests must come first.

16. (U) DAS Cheney has cleared this message.
GNEHM